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**Jean Duffy Rereads  
*L'Opoponax* by Monique Wittig**

- <sup>1</sup> The year 2014 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Monique Wittig's first novel *L'Opoponax*, a work which, although fêted by writers such as Claude Simon, Marguerite Duras, Nathalie Sarraute and Mary McCarthy<sup>1</sup>, awarded the Prix Médicis and widely translated, was subsequently rather overshadowed by Wittig's later work, with most critics focusing on gender issues<sup>2</sup> and reading it, retrospectively, as a feminist text in the making<sup>3</sup>. My first encounter with *L'Opoponax* dates to the early 1980s. I owe that initial acquaintance to Claude Simon's eloquent review of the novel. Since I was then writing my doctoral thesis on Simon, his enthusiasm prompted me to read it essentially for the sidelight it might cast on his work. However, I was captivated by Wittig's novel and, although I knew that my first article was bound to be devoted to Simon, I was keen to write a second on *L'Opoponax*<sup>4</sup>. In the intervening thirty years, I have reread the novel several times and it never fails to surprise me, each reading bringing new insights or pleasures; sometimes, it is an overlooked detail that demands further thought and exegesis, or that simply provokes a smile; at other times, attention is caught by a previously unseen pattern that suggests a new axis of interpretation. Above all perhaps, each reading has sharpened my awareness of the structural intricacy and cultural range of this unconventional, but ostensibly simple narrative of childhood<sup>5</sup>. In this essay I focus on an aspect of the novel — intertextuality — which accounts in part for that intricacy and which testifies to the rich assimilated culture that has informed its writing. Intertextuality figures as a topic in several of the publications devoted to *L'Opoponax*<sup>6</sup>, but in each case coverage has tended to be selective and there has been little discussion of the ways in which the many quotations and references dialogue with each other. In the following pages, I offer an overview of the novel's intertextual range and an analysis of the interaction that takes place not just between it and other texts but also within it, among quotations and references that are often apparently very different in theme, register and generic origin. As the text progresses, the intertextual materials and the infratextual play among those materials not only offer reference points and textual echoes that allow the reader to gauge the children's intellectual and emotional development; they also provide the basis for much of the text's humour and serve as key elements in its metafictional engagement with and exposure of its own compositional principles and strategies.

**Intellectual and Emotional Development and the Intertext**

- <sup>2</sup> In *L'Opoponax*, the children's intellectual development is charted via various fictional devices, but perhaps chiefly through references to and quotations from the materials — printed and oral, popular and literary, educational and recreational — that they read and recite, and through the relative density of those references in different parts of the text. In the first half of the narrative,

the children's cultural co-ordinates are rooted largely in the oral tradition, in *comptines*, folksongs, tongue-twisters, riddles, proverbs, and the recitations and responses of the Catholic Mass. Though the references to this oral legacy are brief, they punctuate the first three chapters. On the most general level, they act as vehicles for the consolidation of group identity and as metonymic markers of the socio-cultural forces and rituals that bind a community together. However, they also perform more particular textual functions; often paired or contrasted with each other, they allow the reader to follow the changes taking place in the children's processing of experience and conceptualisation of the world. Thus, the reference to the *comptine* "Maman, les p'tits bateaux qui vont sur l'eau ont-ils des jambes" (11) highlights the magico-mythical reasoning that characterises the child's approach to his/her world and that is exemplified at various points in the children's interpretations of phenomena; by contrast, the slightly dismissive tone used to summarise Anne-Marie Losserand's account of the Cinderella story suggests scepticism and a higher level of reality-congruence:

La princesse n'a pas le droit d'aller au bal. Mais elle se met une aile de poulet sur la tête, une pelure d'oignon autour du cou elle enfle le tablier de la cuisinière et elle attend dans sa chambre que la fée vienne arranger tout ça avec son bâton relever l'aile de poulet pour lui donner bon air et défriper le tablier. (89)

- 3 As the children's experience broadens and diversifies and they begin to apprehend the difference between word and thing, between representation and reality, the literalist reasoning prompted by the discrepancy between the words of a singing game and observable actuality gives way to a more associative and analogical way of thinking in which personal experience and cultural heritage figure as complementary and mutually enriching factors:

à ma main droite y a un rosier qui fleurira au mois de mai et on montre la main droite. Catherine regarde de ce côté, on n'est pas au mois de mai, ainsi le rosier n'a pas encore poussé. (8-9)

Sur la plus haute des collines on voit la ferme des buis. C'est une toute petite maison blanche vue d'en bas. Ça ressemble à la chanson, là-haut sur la montagne, y avait un vieux chalet. (67)

- 4 Walking songs develop physical/linguistic coordination and facilitate differentiation of cognate sounds<sup>7</sup>, but the variations in the children's responses to the songs' content also serve as measures of their development and, in some instances, of their resistance to received wisdom. If the instruction to sing "[N]e pleure pas Jeannette on te mariera" (71) meets no opposition, the association triggered by "beau gars qui danses" highlights a disregard of gender stereotyping and a readiness to adapt the inherited oral culture to reflect the reality they know: "[Noémie Mazat] a des bottes ferrées. Quand on chante, beau gars qui danses, fais sonner sonner tes bo-ttes au talon bordé de cuivre on pense à elle" (157)<sup>8</sup>. Proverbs provide the teacher with ready-made formulaic responses that have a strong moralising edge ("les mauvais ouvriers ont toujours de mauvais outils", 29), but other oral genres are appropriated and adapted in ways that bypass and, indeed, subvert the structures of authority: the riddle the teacher sets the class on page 14 plants a seed that will bear fruit in the second part of the novel when Catherine devises the notion of the "opoponax" (179-80) and resorts to anonymous notes and riddling in order to communicate indirectly

with Valerie Borge (230, 240, 242, 247-49). Finally, although the children are easily distracted from the walking song and its disciplining rhythm and though, in class, they soon tire of the drills that are designed to improve their reading and enunciation (23), these songs and exercises promote an awareness of the inventive potential of language, its capacity to conjure up alternative worlds (“dans une citrouille y avait un crapaud volant”, 42) and a sensitivity to its material properties that allows them not only to enjoy Hergé’s phonological humour (146), but — at a later stage — also to appreciate the linguistic patterns and textures of the literary works they read.

- 5 In the second half of the novel, the intertextual references are considerably more frequent and more complex both in their localised functions and in their interplay with each other. Here, they serve as markers not only of intellectual progress but also of emotional development and the process of individuation. In this narrative, where indicators of time’s passage are largely implicit, the move to secondary school is signalled by the appearance of quotations from the literary canon. Thus, already in the pivotal chapter 4, the literary text begins, at least for Catherine, to take precedence over popular genres. Here, she peruses her literature manual, while Vincent Parme chuckles at the jokes of *On a marché sur la lune*<sup>9</sup>: not only is Catherine distinguished from her friend by her literary interests<sup>10</sup>, but her criticism of the manual’s *morceaux choisis* format reminds us of her earlier impatience with elementary reading drills and provides a coordinate by which to assess the intellectual evolution that has taken place in the interval. The passage that arrests her attention (the description of Salammbô’s first — highly theatrical — appearance in Flaubert’s novel) attests Catherine’s pleasure in the sensual possibilities of language and, by the additional literary association that it triggers in her mind, shows her alertness to the links between different parts of the curriculum and her retention of quite sophisticated literary and linguistic points:

Alors Catherine Legrand se remet à feuilleter le livre de lecture en s’arrêtant à, des tresses de perles attachées à ses tempes descendaient jusqu’aux coins de sa bouche, rose, comme une grenade entr’ouverte. Il y avait sur sa poitrine un assemblage de pierres lumineuses imitant par leur bigarrure les écailles d’une murène. Ça se passe à Carthage. On a appris une règle de grammaire latine et dans l’exemple il est question de Carthage en ces termes, ceterum, censeo Carthaginem esse delendam, soit la rengaine de Caton, soit la règle du gérondif ou de l’adjectif verbal. (147)<sup>11</sup>

- 6 The opening lines of the following chapter plunge the reader somewhat disconcertingly into an excerpt from *Aliscans*<sup>12</sup> and, only gradually through correlation of other clues (the appearance of unfamiliar pupils’ and teachers’ names, the reference to the girls’ “blouse noire”), do we work out that Catherine is now in a different school. As the text progresses, the children’s longer attention span is indicated in modifications in narrative rhythm, the swift scene changes of the early pages ceding to longer, more detailed descriptions of their activities. However, here as before, the interplay among intertextual references highlights discreet but important changes taking place in the ways they relate to their world and to culture. The passage devoted to the girls’ encounter with medieval epic poetry needs to be read in relation to several other passages, all of which involve intertextual reference or quotation: the earlier accounts of the

history lesson about Charlemagne and of the war games played in the woods; the extract from *Salammbô*; the later accounts of Catherine's exploration of the poetry of Charles d'Orléans and of the activities in which she engages during the *travaux manuels*. The rallying cries of the children as they enter into battle in chapter 4 ("Dieu et ma gloire", "honneur aux vaincus", 119) and the lines from *Aliscans* that the girls incorporate into their competitive games in chapter 5 (156-57) illustrate the assimilation of acquired knowledge into play. However, in chapter 4, the better "training" of the boys' army resulted in the routing of the girls' forces, while the history-book account in chapter 3 of Carolingian educational reforms was illustrated by an image which highlighted the disregard of the needs of girls in the 787 capitulary (104). By contrast in chapter 5, the story of Guibourc's defense of the city offers the girls a strong-minded, perspicacious and active female role-model which they embrace with enthusiasm. Viewed in relation to the later passages (176, 197), the counterpoint between the broad sweep of the epic and the constrained form of the rondeau, between, on the one hand, the group's adoption of lines from the anonymous *Aliscans* as a kind of second-degree communicative code and, on the other, Catherine's private study of the introspective poetry of Charles d'Orléans intimates the latter's gradual development of a sense of self that is distinct from the peer-group identity that prevails in the first part of the narrative. The differences between the artistic enterprises associated with the extracts from *Aliscans* and those that Catherine undertakes during the *travaux manuels* are also telling. Her earlier reading of the *Salammbô* extract informs her attempts to draw Guibourc's suit of armour but, here as elsewhere, she is not satisfied with the results: "Catherine Legrand dessine chaque maille du haubert ça ressemble à des écailles. Guibourc est un poisson sans queue avec un œil plus gros que l'autre sous le heaume ce qui fait que Catherine Legrand efface Guibourc et dessine les crénaux de la tour d'Orange" (154). By pages 196-97, however, she has devised her own strategy to compensate for the gap between her ambitions and her graphic skills, and the solution adopted reflects both her increased independence and the refinement of her aesthetic sensibility. Thus, whereas the earlier drawings had a straightforward illustrative objective and were intended simply to reproduce elements from the *Aliscans* story, the herbarium that she produces during the handwork sessions is a much more complex verbal/visual composition, based upon assemblage and the correlation of found objects and elements — quotations from Leopardi ("La Ginestra"), Rimbaud ("Fleurs" and "Ophélie") and Charles d'Orléans (rondeau LIV) — drawn from its creator's ever-widening cultural knowledge.

- 7 Interwoven with the evocation of their intellectual growth, *L'Opoponax* also charts the children's emotional development. Catherine's first encounter with Valerie and the evolution of her attraction to her coincide with her initiation to and growth of interest in "real" literature. As a tentative relationship is established, the two girls communicate indirectly via exchanges of verse: two lines from Malherbe's "Larmes de Saint Pierre" that Valerie surreptitiously records in her notebook and that Catherine reads aloud in class (174); the line from Leopardi that Catherine uses as *légende* in her herbarium, inscribing it next to the piece of mica provided by Valerie (196); the completed herbarium that she passes to Valerie but that the latter passes on to another girl before Catherine

has time to tell her “qu'elle a fait ça pour elle” (198); the quotation from Louise Labé inscribed by Catherine in the earth that Valerie reads aloud and that she had already found “écrits de la main de Catherine Legrand” in her desk (201); a poem that Valerie claims to have written and that she shows to Catherine (259); the quotation from Baudelaire that they recite in unison (270) and that, in the context (they are on a train, standing apart from the rest of the school group), suggests longing to be alone together, far from their peers, teachers and a school environment that offers no privacy.

- 8 It is, of course, possible to see in the girls' literary borrowings an attempt to find a covert code by which to express a love that “dare not speak its name”<sup>13</sup>. However, such a reading seems to me to be unnecessarily restrictive. Just as the word “opopanax” is appropriated, adapted and employed by Catherine to designate various phenomena that trouble her and that she cannot explain or categorise (unexpected obstructions, eerie sensations, noises in the night, physical itching with no obvious cause, 180, 230), so the two girls resort to literature to convey a whole set of confused and confusing feelings, moods, and sensations that are bound up in the phenomenon we might loosely call “premier amour”, “puppy love” or “adolescent crush”. Virgil, Tibullus, Charles d'Orléans, Labé, Scève, Malherbe, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Leopardi and Flaubert all act as proxies to convey these sentiments and reactions, whether it be the shock of initial attraction, the unfamiliarity of feelings engendered by another person, the longing, the pain, the doubt, the despair, the yearning for the privacy that would allow emotions to expand and bloom, or the fear of self-revelation and of loss. Consistent with her resistance to imposed gendering, Wittig happily plunders the work of male authors both heterosexual and homosexual; devotional poetry is raided with the same enthusiasm as the love-sonnets of Labé or Scève. If the evocation of Salammbô anticipates Catherine's encounter with Valerie and the strangeness of the feelings that the other girl will stir in her, the brief extract from Leopardi stresses the way in which Valerie stands out from her peers and her surroundings<sup>14</sup>, while the quotations from Tibullus<sup>15</sup> and Virgil<sup>16</sup> evoke the pain of love and suggest the terror of loss. As Catherine's attraction develops, the verse extracts translate her perception of Valerie as an unattainable object of desire; moreover, although the brief anatomical descriptions of the latter that punctuate the second half of the novel chart, in a psychologically naturalistic fashion, the trajectories of Catherine's gaze, they are also strongly reminiscent of the Petrarchan *blason*<sup>17</sup>. Other extracts hint at the part the love for another plays in the formation of identity or explore the relationship between self, other and creativity: thus, Labé's sonnet XIV, part of which is quoted on page 201<sup>18</sup>, evokes “love's contribution to a heightened sense of self”<sup>19</sup>; in Vigny's “Maison du berger”, an extract of which appears on page 233<sup>20</sup>, poetry figures as the outcome of a redemptive experience (love) by which the poet discovers himself and can embrace his creative vocation; in “L'Invitation au voyage”, quoted on pages 254, 268, 270, 276 and 281, the lover embarks on a *voyage immobile* which is prompted by his feelings for his mistress and through which he gains access and gives ekphrastic expression to “les rapports intimes et secrets des choses, les correspondances et les analogies”<sup>21</sup> that all Baudelaire's poetry seeks to capture, while, as Valerie Minogue points out, “Rimbaud's version of Ophelia's story centres on the gap between experience and expression, a gap

which is dramatically presented in the mute prince and in an Ophelia 'strangled' by her visions"<sup>22</sup>.

- 9 An admirer of Nathalie Sarraute's writing<sup>23</sup>, Wittig shows herself, in her treatment of the relationship between the two girls, to be acutely sensitive to subconversational communication, near-communication and missed communication and to the push-pull tropismic responses underlying human relations. In some respects, her exploration of this dynamic in *L'Opoponax* is formally less radical than that of Sarraute and she eschews the densely metaphorical language that is Sarraute's medium of expression; rather she explores the expressive potential of intertextual play<sup>24</sup>, resorting to quotations that resonate with each other, glance off each other, compete for attention, and that locate these adolescent stirrings within the long, tortured, but infinitely creative history of human romance, that — even as a sense of self starts to assume a clearer outline — situate them within a vast process of intersubjective attractions, interactions and transactions.

### Intertextuality and Humour

- 10 One of the aspects of *L'Opoponax* that is perhaps most frequently ignored or underplayed is its humour. Much of that humour derives from Wittig's exploitation of intertextual material, in particular, from the tension between quotation and context and, I would argue, from unacknowledged borrowings from certain popular dramatic forms. Sudden shifts in register or tone or the unexpected appropriation or *détournement* of a particular quotation are a frequent source of comedy. An important stage in the development of the girls' relationship is marked by the passage in which Catherine reads aloud from Valerie's *cahier* and by the looks they exchange as she does so; however, the fact that their attraction to each other is communicated via a line from a baroque devotional poem on the topic of saintly penitence (Malherbe's "Larmes de Saint Pierre") has a humorous and subversive piquancy:

C'est ce qui fait que Catherine Legrand se lève en disant, et déjà devant moi les campagnes se peignent et alors Valerie Borge relève la tête en regardant du côté où est Catherine Legrand comme ça. Catherine Legrand la regarde en plein dans les yeux pour dire, du safran que le jour apporte de la mer. (174)<sup>25</sup>

- 11 Equally piquant are those passages devoted to religious services and Mlle Caylus's funeral wake which juxtapose, on the one hand, deadpan descriptions of ritual sequences and excerpts from the Catholic liturgy and, on the other, the amorous, emblem-like detailing of those physical features of Valerie that catch Catherine's attention (190-91, 209, 278). In the literature class on Corneille's *Cinna* and "le gouvernement des passions", Nicole Marre's innocent query about the teacher's inability to control her gastric reflexes provides bathetic humour ("À un moment donné Nicole Marre lui demande, pourquoi est-ce que vous rotez tout le temps", 223), while there is an amusing "coincidence" in the facts that the only lines from the *Georgics* homework passage the normally assiduous Catherine can translate are "restitit, Euridicenque suam, jam luce sub ipsa, immemor, heu ! victusque animi respexit" (251) and that she resolves to camouflage her inadequate preparation by volunteering her translation of these

lines in class — i.e. in the presence of Valerie. This resolution leaves her free to scrutinize at her leisure the accompanying illustration which shows Orpheus and Euridyce's final moments together; it also indicates her romantic opportunism, the promptness with which she grasps a chance to communicate indirectly with her "beloved".

- 12 Another important source of humour is to be found in the numerous quasi-mime sequences that occur throughout the text: scenes that are silent or near-silent, in which the characters' movement and gestures are recorded with meticulous precision. Frequently, these sequences involve mishaps or evoke obstacles encountered by the children as they try to execute simple practical tasks, and they frequently call to mind circus clownery and the slapstick routines of music-hall, silent film comedy and the early talkies, as well as certain antecedents (e.g. the *lazzi* of the Commedia dell'Arte) and more recent literary variants, in particular the antics of the characters of Samuel Beckett's early plays. Indeed, it might be argued that the novel's structural coherence depends partly upon the occurrence/recurrence of comic interludes which — notwithstanding their apparent naturalism — are closely related to the gags of slapstick comedy<sup>26</sup>. Thus, Wittig's repertoire includes: mischief gags in which a character misbehaves just out of sight of an authority figure (168, 259-60); a food fight (131); chase sequences, one of which ends with a classic dive into a river (31-32, 132-33, 274); near-miss gags (e.g. Reine-Dieu fails to recognise her own strength and almost impales her teacher with a makeshift javelin, almost breaks a window by hurling a rubber at it, 69, 92-93); fixation gags in which a character pursues a goal regardless of consequences (e.g. Reine Dieu's yanking of a white hair from the back of her teacher's head, 64); "doofus" gags in which the character sets herself up for a fall or self-injury (e.g. the inevitable rebound of the piece of elastic that Reine-Dieu loops around her button and tries to hold between her teeth, 37); misplaced laughter gags (Nicole Marre's nervous explosion of laughter at the announcement of the death of Marguerite-Marie Le Monial's mother, 172)<sup>27</sup>; scenes involving recalcitrant animals or animals that chase humans (112-13, 115, 116); and variations on the mannequin gag that figures in various forms in early film comedy, which here highlight the child's confusion of the animate and the inanimate (51).
- 13 The losing battle with inanimate objects — that staple of the clown sequence or the slapstick hijinks of Max Linder, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Laurel and Hardy or the Marx Brothers — is a recurrent motif: thus, erasers (29), pen-holders (35), gloves (18), desk-tops (180) all exemplify matter's recalcitrance to human wishes, while footwear-related mishaps figure prominently, leaving the children with sodden feet, up to their ankles in water (276), earth (41), ice (87), dung (115), human excrement (66), or — in a comic variation on the anxiety dream — struggling against the decelerating weight of boots that are filling with snow (17). On pages 94-95, Catherine engages in a variation on Harpo Marx's trademark leg/foot trick routine<sup>28</sup>, but the joke misfires and turns into an indecent exposure gag that amuses the reader but not her peers who are the target audience. On other occasions — sometimes intentionally, in variations of the pie-in-the-face routine, sometimes through ineptitude — the children cover themselves or parts of their bodies in various substances, whether it be the sawdust, purée and blackberries used as projectiles (110, 131, 137), the



toothpaste Catherine spreads over Vincent Parme (131), the hay into which they jump (144), or the rust they try to wipe from their hands but only succeed in spreading to their clothing (136)<sup>29</sup>. As in slapstick, gravity and mass play important roles in the comic sequences. In a passage recalling both the struggles of Laurel and Hardy in *The Music Box*, as well as the collective fall of Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo and Lucky in *En attendant Godot*<sup>30</sup>, the children decide to right a small truck they find in the woods, and after much puffing and panting, give it such a heave that it topples on to its other side, causing them all to fall on top of it and each other (136). And just as the body language of Keaton and others “[make] salient the interplay of weight and balance”<sup>31</sup>, so Wittig’s children undertake balancing acts in which they or the objects they carry are held in a precarious equilibrium that in some instances falters and collapses: as Catherine and Véronique Legrand pan for gold (perhaps a reference to *The Gold Rush*), the latter slips and slides on the wet rocks, emitting squeals every time she loses her footing or stubs her toe (226); Catherine and Véronique swing on tree branches, but their acrobatics end with a fall “à plat ventre dans les orties, bras nus, jambes nues, cuisses nues” (82); in church the children play a game in which they pretend to lose their balance, but Reine Dieu really does and falls flat on her face (84); on a school outing Nicole Marre pretends to fall off a rock in the river and does so (270); in an only half-successful variation on the “lazzo of spilling no wine”<sup>32</sup>, Sophie Rieux, Anne-Marie Brunet and Denise Causse cross the school playground balancing precariously stacked platefuls of *tartines* while simultaneously nibbling the one on the top of the pile, all the time shedding, as they walk, crumbs and bits of pâté, ham and cheese and causing jam to run down their fingers (217-18). Variations on the repetition gag include the scenes where the children drop things or lark about in church (82-86, 100, 192), the “self-spooking” scenes (17, 20, 49, 90-92), the scuffles from which the children emerge generally unscathed, the episodes in which they overindulge in windfall or purloined fruit and suffer the inevitable gastro-intestinal consequences (112, 142)<sup>33</sup>, and the various disastrous escapades and close shaves of the recidivist Reine Dieu. Finally, while many sequences draw upon generic slapstick gags, there are a few that have more specific resonances and that recall scenes from Beckett. Thus, the passage devoted to Véronique’s removal of her shoelaces (45) and her fruitless efforts to rethread them recall Estragon’s footwear problems in *En attendant Godot*<sup>34</sup>, while the sequence evoking Nicole Marre’s ladder-and-basket antics (262), if it reminds us of the “lazzo of the ladder”<sup>35</sup> and countless circus variations, has particular echoes of the ladder-and-telescope routine in Beckett’s *Fin de Partie*<sup>36</sup>.

### Cultural Ancestry, Narrative Focalisation/Voice, and Reflexivity

- <sup>14</sup> In the early reviews and, indeed, much of the subsequent academic criticism, the feature of *L'Opoponax* most frequently singled out as a marker of originality was its sustained use of the epicene pronoun “on” to designate and situate narrative focaliser and voice. Although the analysis and understanding of the working of this device and of the interaction between the epicene and personal pronouns have, over the last fifty years, been considerably refined, notably in the work of Anna Livia, Dominique Bourque and Yvette Went-Daoust<sup>37</sup>, there has been

relatively little discussion of the literary antecedents that may have informed Wittig's approach to narration in *L'Opoponax*. The immediate contemporary literary context is, of course, pertinent to any discussion of narrative voice/focalisation in Wittig. While she does not detail the ways in which the *nouveau roman* inflected her own writing, she does acknowledge repeatedly in *Le chantier littéraire* its influence on her work, and it seems likely that her exposure to the radical experiments of, for example, Robbe-Grillet in *La Jalousie*, Butor in *Degrés*, Simon in *La Route des Flandres* and Sarraute in *Les Fruits d'or*, informed her narratorial method in *L'Opoponax*<sup>38</sup>.

- 15 However, there is another earlier text, or rather set of texts, whose similarities — both thematic and technical — with *L'Opoponax* are even stronger; strong enough for one to hazard the hypothesis that Wittig's novel is, to some extent, a conscious reworking of certain elements from that earlier corpus. The texts concerned are the short stories that Valéry Larbaud published in *La phalange* and *La nouvelle revue française* between 1908 and 1914 and that subsequently appeared as *Enfantines*<sup>39</sup>. Among the similarities between *L'Opoponax* and the stories of *Enfantines* one might cite, in particular, the following: the exploration of the same-sex crush ("Rose Lourdin") and of sexual awakening and fantasy ("Portrait d'Éliane"); the prominence given to the child's engagement with books and his/her impatience with "morceaux choisis" ("Devoirs de vacances"); the evocation of long summers spent playing improvised games involving mock-battles, role-play, dragooning of a family pet and the incorporation of material from the children's lessons ("La Grande Époque"); the marginality of the adults (*passim* in Larbaud's tales); the death of a child and the short-lived attention accorded to it by other children who move on rapidly to other more mundane things ("Dolly"); magical-thinking ("L'Heure avec la figure"); the designation of child characters by both forename and surname ("Rachel Frutiger"). Most interesting, however, and most pertinent here is the fact that, in one way or another, all Larbaud's stories show a bold, modern and sophisticated exploration of narrative voice and perspective. Four of these tales have a particular resonance in this context. Like Catherine, the narrator of "Devoirs de vacances" is impatient to read beyond the level set by his school programme and fills his summer vacation with ambitious reading projects, but the scholarly "nous" and occasional "on" that he affects fail to camouflage the loneliness underlying these projects. Like *L'Opoponax*, "Rose Lourdin" evokes an adolescent girl's passionate infatuation with a class-mate, but in Larbaud's tale the final revelations — that the adult narrator is a successful actress and that her name is a stage pseudonym — cast doubt over the reliability of the preceding narrative and, consequently, the identity and personality of the "je" who has been recounting her early life. In two of Larbaud's tales, the pronoun "on" is used extensively by the narrators. In "La Grande Époque", the sudden change at the end of the story in the way one playmate addresses another (the use of "vous" which has the effect of designating the bourgeois Marcel as the "fils du patron") throws into question the appropriateness of the collective "on" that has characterised the account of their summer games, that implied a shared experience and a shared pleasure, but that may simply have been the product of one "poor little rich boy's" wishful thinking. In "L'Heure avec la figure" the change from "on" to "nous" — again at the close of the tale — reflects the inevitable shift from the

magico-mythical perspective of a child who invents an imaginary companion as a helper in the negotiation of difficult moments to the nostalgic vision of adulthood which can only look back wistfully towards a lost enchanted world.

16 The shift in pronoun and the variation in tenses that characterise the final borrowed sentence of *L'Opoponax* work on several levels within the novel's thematic economy. The text closes with a first-person statement ("tant je l'aimais qu'en elle encore je vis", 281) that suggests that Catherine, as she hovers in the *entre-deux* between childhood and adulthood, is ready to assume the personal identity that has gradually been emerging in the course of the novel; however, the fact that the first-person declaration is a literary borrowing from Scève<sup>40</sup> testifies also to the crucial role that cultural heritage plays in the formation of identity. As noted by several critics, the use here of a line written by a male poet can also be read as kind of sting in the tail, a feminist gesture of cultural appropriation that anticipates the rewriting of myth and canon that takes place in *Les Guérillères* and *Virgile, non*<sup>41</sup>. Another rather different interpretation, hinging on the temporal adverb ("encore") and its binding of past and present, might make a link between the final sentence, the various dead young women figuring in some of the intertexts (Ophelia, Salammbo, Eurydice)<sup>42</sup>, and the fact that it follows hard on the account of Mlle Caylus's funeral; one might then conclude that Catherine is not just looking back nostalgically to a first love that has indelibly marked her life, but reflecting elegiacally and mournfully on a beloved lost forever to death<sup>43</sup>. Viewed in this way, the resumption, immediately before the quotation from Scève, of Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au voyage" would act as a haunting and poignant reminder of the train journey discussed earlier and of a time when the girls' lives seemed to stretch indefinitely into the future, when "Luxe, calme et volupté" remained a possibility<sup>44</sup>. Yet another reading would attribute a more ludic, reflexive function to the final line. According to this perspective, Wittig, in a playful gesture worthy of the *nouveau roman*, enlists the help of Scève in order momentarily to raise a question-mark over the genre of the text we have just read, dangling enticingly before us the temptation of a biographical interpretation. Yet, even as it invites us down the well-travelled critical path that would lead from fiction to autobiography, the final line — by triggering a memory from our own cultural baggage and reminding us of the palimpsestic nature of the fictional self that is being articulated here — simultaneously blocks off that path<sup>45</sup> and redirects us back into the novel and to the many crisscrossing interpretative tracks mapped out by its intertextual resonances and the patterns woven by its myriad infratextual echoes and correspondences.

17 The self-consciousness and ludic dimension of the conclusion have been anticipated at numerous points in the foregoing text. In many instances, the intertextual quotations and references encountered earlier also serve a reflexive function providing implicit metafictional comment on the novel's compositional techniques and principles. Thus, in the passage devoted to Sidonius Apollinaris, the child's convoluted reasoning reveals a narrative preference that corresponds closely to the ahierarchical approach of *L'Opoponax*. The passage begins with an earnest, methodical process of deduction, as the child, drawing on as many relevant historical co-ordinates as she can muster, tries to situate Sidonius chronologically:

On suppose que c'est l'évêque de Clermont, que c'est bien avant Charlemagne, bien avant les églises romanes, après saint Augustin, Tertullien et Suétone. Disons que c'est quand Grégoire de Tours dans l'Histoire des Francs parle des Mérovingiens, que c'est quelque part dans un temps où il n'y a pas de routes goudronnées pour se balader dans le pays. (167)

- 18 As the passage develops, her preoccupation with name-and-date history gives way to a deliberation that is evidently rooted in her own observations and sensory experience; after a detailed description of the sounds a wooden-wheeled cart would make on an unmacadamed Roman road, of the friction of wood against wood, of the jolts caused by gaps in the paving, the child concludes that, if Sidonius wrote about wars, it was to combat boredom, because there was little passing traffic on the Roman roads (167-68). If the child's logic breaks down part-way through her ponderous reflections, her conception of the narrative-worthy is very close to that of Wittig: her interest lies not in the battles, potentates and epochs of schoolbook history that she logs for rote-learning ("On note, dynastie des Mérovingiens, Mérovée, Childéric, Chilpéric, Clovis et Clotaire", 168), but in the detail and minutiae of life, the textures, sounds, shades and particulars of the material world:

Les chars qui passent à roues de bois sautent d'une pierre à l'autre à cause du manque de ciment aux jointures il y a un intervalle, c'est forcé, même si on serre bien les pierres l'une contre l'autre on les voit passer lentement sur la route entre les arbres, on les voit s'enfoncer dans la forêt en sautillant en faisant une espèce de grincement régulier, parce que le bois frotte contre le bois parce que l'essieu qui porte tout le poids du chariot est en bois parce que les roues qui tournent autour sont en bois parce que ça ne sert à rien de mettre de l'huile, alors ça fait un bruit comme des pépiements d'oiseau qui a peur et parce qu'il n'y a pas de ressort on a l'impression qu'à chaque tour de roue le chariot en heurtant la pierre de la dalle va se démantibuler se désarticuler. (167-68)

- 19 The references to various religious publications and the quotations from the Bible and other religious sources (Roman Missal, Saints' Lives, devotional pictures) serve a range of functions. The children's attention to and participation (or lack thereof) in the responses of the Latin Mass provide a measure of the extent to which they have or have not understood the structures and meanings of ritual and assimilated liturgical code. The story of Esther, like that of Guibourg, provides the girls with a strong female role-model (156), while Catherine's rejection of the proposed reading material for the retreat (the "Vies des saints" and Pascal's reflections on "the disproportion of man"), in favour of the transcription of a line from Charles d'Orléans, and an attempt first to draw and then to define in language the "opoponax", offers an early indicator of her growing intellectual independence and her drive to express what she has not found expressed elsewhere (179). The missal and devotional pictures also figure as props in some of the comic "mime" scenes discussed earlier. Among these scenes, one is of particular interest because of its metafictional implications. In this passage, Catherine watches closely as Valerie combats boredom during the mass by making coin rubbings on a page of her missal, using the small change found in her pockets; gradually she covers the entire surface and, when she runs out of new coins, reuses those she has already rubbed (191-92). On one level, the scene simply recounts yet another small act of defiance which reinforces Catherine's attraction to Valerie (the former is fascinated). Read metafictionally,

however, the description of the page of the missal covered with rubbings of profiles from coins can be read both as a kind of primitive artwork that provocatively brings together religion and Mammon and as a *mise en abyme* that calls attention to the role played by *bricolage* and found materials in *L'Opoponax*. Moreover, by virtue of the fact that Valerie's pastime is founded on the combination of apparently contradictory principles (direct re-presentation of real coins; proliferation, repetition and superimposition of representations), the visuo-verbal configuration created replicates in miniature the dynamic interplay in the novel between mimesis and the recirculation of palimpsestic literary currency.

20 Perhaps the wittiest aspect of Wittig's reflexive deployment of intertextual material relates to the fact that her choice of quotations repeatedly foregrounds and thematises the process of intertextual borrowing itself. It is surely not accidental that so many of the authors cited were themselves engaged in various ways with intertextual, interlingual and often intermedial borrowing and appropriation. For his composition of *Salammbô*, Flaubert's reading was extensive and included, amongst others, Polybius, Aristotle, Procopius, Corippus, Silius Italicus, Isidorus, Selden, Braunius, Pliny, Athenaeus, Plutarch, Xenophon, Michelet, the Bible and articles from the *Revue archéologique*<sup>46</sup>. The poetry of Baudelaire is saturated with references to a wide range of texts<sup>47</sup>; Rimbaud's "Ophélie" recalls not only Shakespeare's *Hamlet* but also Banville's *Voie lactée*<sup>48</sup>, while Leopardi's *Canti* are deeply indebted to the pastoral poetry of Theocritus, Virgil, and Moschus, as well as to Tasso and Guarino<sup>49</sup>. Corneille's principal source for *Cinna* is Seneca's *De Clementia* via Montaigne's essay "Divers evenemens de mesme conseil", but he also draws on Dion Cassius, Appian of Alexandria, Suetonius and Georges de Scudéry<sup>50</sup>. If Malherbe's "Larmes de Saint Pierre" draws on the Bible (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62), it is also modelled on Luigi Tansillo's *Le Lagrime di san Pietro* (1560)<sup>51</sup>, while Scève and Labé's love poetry is informed by Petrarch, by the emblem tradition and by classical literature<sup>52</sup>. *Aliscans* is doubly intertextual by virtue of its status as *chanson de geste* (i.e. a work that had probably circulated in oral forms, been subject to *remaniement* and whose transmission was characterised by *mouvance* and intervocality<sup>53</sup>) and by the fact that it belongs to a cycle of texts that dialogue with each other. The poetry and letters of Sidonius draw on Pliny, Livy, Horace, Lucan and Silius Italicus, amongst others<sup>54</sup>, while Virgil's *Georgics* is full of echoes of other authors (Homer, Hesiod, Theophrastus, Erastothanes, Nicander, Lucretius, Varro, Catullus and Cornelius Gaius)<sup>55</sup>. And, of course, the various oral, dramatic and visuo-verbal popular genres from which Wittig draws quotations, that inform her mime sequences and that engage the interest of characters, are also rooted in traditions of borrowing, adaptation, translation, transcoding and reinterpretation. Even the comic book read by Vincent Parme is indebted to Jules Verne and to the scientific writings of Alexandre Ananoff, Wernher von Braun and Hermann Oberth<sup>56</sup>.

21 Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, the task of articulating the key lesson to be drawn from this proliferation and overlaying of texts, genres and traditions of various sorts is given to "Ma mère de saint Hippolyte" in the antepenultimate literary reference in the novel. As the girls rehearse a dramatized version of *The Odyssey*, she points out the high number of stories that are told across the epic:

Ma mère de saint Hippolyte dit que c'est la principale action de l'Odyssée parce que sauf les démêlés de Télémaque avec les prétendants de Pénélope, sauf quand il part aux nouvelles, tout ce qu'on sait des personnages d'Ulysse de la guerre de Troie des périples des retours, c'est des gens assis devant des tables d'hôtes qui le racontent, dans le chant trois Nestor à Télémaque, dans le chant quatre Ménélas à Télémaque, dans le chant huit Demodocos à ceux qui prennent part au festin d'Alcinoos, dans les chants neuf dix onze douze treize Ulysse à Alcinoos, ma mère de saint Hippolyte dit que d'autre part Ménélas raconte ce que lui a raconté Protée, Ulysse raconte ce que lui ont raconté Circé, Tirésias, Autolycos, Agamemnon, ainsi ma mère de saint Hippolyte dit que c'est la principale action de l'Odyssée qui sera représentée sur le théâtre. (265-66)

- 22 The work that, along with *The Iliad*, stands at the beginning of European literature and that has frequently been seen as the prototype from which was eventually to emerge modern fiction is revealed to be, in part, a story about story-telling which, in its internal layering of narrative upon narrative, establishes one of the central dynamic principles of the history of literature. Moreover, as the girls and their teacher give dramatic form to the epic, they are themselves, in their own very modest way, adding yet another deposit of adaptation and reinterpretation to the infinitely complex palimpsestic history of Western literature.
- 23 There is no doubt that gender-based readings of *L'Opoponax* have yielded important interpretative insights. In particular, they have identified certain threads of thematic and formal continuity connecting Wittig's first novel to the rest of her work and have offered often ingenious exegeses of the detail of the text. However, thought-provoking though many of those readings are, that emphasis on the continuity and coherence of Wittig's *œuvre* and the interpretation of *L'Opoponax* as a combative text that is primarily concerned with gender issues have at times, it seems to me, worked against a full appreciation of the scope, complexity and ambiguities of this first novel and have underplayed some of the features that make it a landmark not just in fiction about childhood but in fiction more generally and that account for the breadth of appeal that brought it such a warm reception on publication. In this essay, through an analysis of the body of intertextual materials that are interwoven across the novel, I have explored some of those features and in particular: the very rich range of cultural reference; the elaboration of an intricate and dynamic network of internal echoes and correspondences that traverse the text and in which the multivalent intertextual materials play off against each other, challenging the reader to try (and fail) to disentangle the affective life of the child from the re-presented emotions of long-dead poets, to distinguish between spontaneous reaction and reading-induced feelings, aspirations and ideals; the crafting of a narrative that, even as it meticulously tracks the stages of the children's acquisition of skills and their intellectual and emotional development, simultaneously offers a sustained metafictional reflection on its modes and principles of composition; and Wittig's discreet but extensive and wide-ranging exploitation of the routines and gags of a longstanding clownery and slapstick tradition. If *L'Opoponax* remains fresh fifty years after its publication, it is, I would argue, not so much because of any particular message or messages that it might be construed as imparting, but

above all because of this particular combination of close observation and radical formal experimentation, the finely judged balance between mimesis and intertextual play, and its enduring capacity to amuse.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Claude Simon, "Pour Monique Wittig", *L'Express*, 30 novembre 1964, 70-71; Marguerite Duras, "Une œuvre éclatante", *France Observateur*, 5 novembre 1964, 18-19; Nathalie Sarraute, "Entretien avec Pierre Boncenne", *Lire*, 94, juin 1983, 87-92; Mary McCarthy, "Everybody's Childhood", *New Statesman*, 72.1844, 15 juillet 1966, 90-94.
- <sup>2</sup> Cécile Lindsay, "Body/Language: French Feminist Utopias", *French Review* 60.1, 1986, 46-55; Teresa De Lauretis, "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation", *Theatre Journal* 40.2, 1988, 155-77.
- <sup>3</sup> Hélène Vivienne Wenzel, "The Text as Body/Politics: An Appreciation of Monique Wittig's Writings in Context", *Feminist Studies* 7.2, 1981, 264-87; Jamie Davis, "Coming out Fighting: The Warrior Girls of Monique Wittig's *L'Opoponax*", <http://crisolenguas.uprrp.edu/Articles/JamieDavis.pdf> [consulted 21 April 2014]; James D. Davis, *Beautiful War: Uncommon Violence, Praxis, and Aesthetics in the Novels of Monique Wittig*, New York, Peter Lang, 2010. In the following edited volumes, *L'Opoponax* is mentioned in passing: Namascar Shaktini (ed.), *On Monique Wittig: Theoretical, Political and Literary Essays*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2005; Brad Eps and Jonathan Katz (eds), *Monique Wittig: At the Crossroads of Criticism*, *GLQ* 13.4, 2007; Benoît Auclerc and Yannick Chevalier (eds), *Lire Monique Wittig Aujourd'hui*, Lyon, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2012. Exceptions to this pattern include the following which, while they acknowledge links with Wittig's later work, offer broader-based critical readings of *L'Opoponax*: Marcelle Marini, "Enfance en archipels: *L'Opoponax* de Monique Wittig", *Revue des sciences humaines* 222, 1991, 143-59; Catherine Écarnot, *L'Écriture de Monique Wittig. À la couleur de Sapho*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2002; Dominique Bourque, *Écrire l'inter-dit. La subversion formelle dans l'œuvre de Monique Wittig*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2006. Note also Valerie C. H. Lewis's close reading of the novel which draws on feminist and psychoanalytical theory (*The Female Body in Question, A Study of Monique Wittig's Writing with particular reference to L'Opoponax*, unpublished PhD thesis, Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, 1996), and Margaret Diane Clarke's essay on *L'Opoponax* which examines the relationship between narrative voice/perspective and the evocation of the child-adult dynamic ("*L'Opoponax*: Un implicite enfantin", in David Heap, Elizabeth Lasserre and Jeff Tennant (eds), *La problématique de l'implicite*, Toronto, Editions GFA/ Département de français, Université de Toronto, 1992, 65-78).
- <sup>4</sup> See Jean H. Duffy, "Language and Childhood: *L'Opoponax* by Monique Wittig", *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 19.4, 1983, 289-300.
- <sup>5</sup> Readers who are unfamiliar with the novel may find the following brief commentary helpful. *L'Opoponax* explores the world and the state of childhood as experienced by Catherine Legrand, the nominal protagonist and intermittent focal centre, and her peers, also designated throughout the text by forename and surname and whose ever-changing allegiances are signalled by variations in the lists of names that punctuate the text. Eschewing traditional methods of character- and plot-construction, contravening standard conventions of punctuation and paragraphing, and exploiting the vocal and perspectival ambiguities inherent in the pronoun "on", Wittig's novel is written with a defamiliarising, quasi-phenomenological attention to concrete detail that conveys the child's negotiation of his/her lifeworld and the processes, obstacles and struggles involved in the acquisition of basic competences, knowledge and understanding and in the development of an inner life distinct from peer-group identity. Chapters 1-3 are devoted to the primary-school years and chapters 5-7 to the secondary-school years, with chapter 4, which covers the long, intervening summer vacation, serving as a demarcating and connecting pivot. (See Marini, *op. cit.*, 154-55.) Across this simple framework are interwoven the various strands relating to the children's physical, linguistic, conceptual, cultural and social development and a network of recurrent motifs that allow us to track the stages and nuances of change. In chapters 5-7, shifts in the group dynamics and the gradual focusing of narrative attention on Valerie Borge serve to register Catherine Legrand's intensifying infatuation with her classmate.
- <sup>6</sup> See Duffy, *op. cit.*; Écarnot, *op. cit.*, 36-43; Bourque, *op. cit.*, 60-69; H. Ritter, "Écriture et désécriture dans *L'Opoponax* de Monique Wittig, ou Comment représenter le corps de la sirène?", *Rapports. Het Franse Boek* 70.1, 2000, 28-36; Alain Trouvé, "Événements intertextuels dans *L'Opoponax* de Monique Wittig", in Marie-Madeleine Gladieu et Alain Trouvé (eds), *Parcours de la renaissance intertextuelle*, Reims, Presses Universitaires de Reims, 2006, 41-49.

- 7 "un kilomètre à pied ça use les souliers, gauche, gauche. Quand on dit gauche on doit être sur le pied gauche" (41).
- 8 Their reaction to the fairy-tale is more complex: while they appear to accept the traditional equation of beauty and goodness, evil and ugliness (89), the passage's tone suggests impatience with the heroine's passive role.
- 9 Tournai, Casterman, 1954.
- 10 See also Valerie Lewis's perceptive reading of the gender dynamics of this passage (*op. cit.*, 173).
- 11 *Œuvres complètes de Gustave Flaubert*, 16 vols, ed. Maurice Bardèche, Paris, Club de l'honnête homme, 1971-1975, II, 50.
- 12 *Aliscans*, ed. F. Guessard and A. de Montaiglon, "Les Anciens Poètes de la France" 10, Paris, A. Franck, 1870, p. 120, l. 3977-80. See also p. 155 (l. 3983-86), 156 (l. 3994-95); 163 (l. 2725-28); 175 (l. 2717-2720).
- 13 Erika Ostrovsky, "Transformation of Gender and Gender Paradigms in the Fiction of Monique Wittig", in Shaktini (ed.), *op. cit.*, 115-30, p. 116.
- 14 "e tu lenta ginestra che di selve odorate queste campagne dispogliate adorni" (196).
- 15 "lento me torquet amore" (216). The quotation, from Tibullus's *Elegies*, 1.4.81, evokes the pain caused by Tibullus's love for the boy Marathus.
- 16 "restitit, Euridicenque suam, jam luce sub ipsa, immore, heu ! vistusque animi respexit" (251). The quotation from *The Georgics*, l.490-91, evokes Orpheus's last glimpse of Eurydice.
- 17 See p. 174, 190-91, 201, 209, 228, 229, 254, 258, 259, 266, 269, 277, 278.
- 18 "Plaisant repos, plein de tranquillité continuez toutes les nuits mon songe".
- 19 Sandy Petrey, "The Character of the Speaker in the Poetry of Louise Labé", *French Review* 43.4, 1970, 588-96, p. 592.
- 20 "La nature t'attend dans un silence austère; l'herbe élève à tes pieds son nuage des soirs".
- 21 Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, 2 vols, ed. Claude Pichois, Paris, Gallimard, 1976, II, 329. Note the correspondences between Baudelaire's poem and the content of this final chapter (references to journeys, to Catherine's tears, and to water, waterways, fluidity). Baudelaire's poem is fragmented and distributed across a chapter where the juxtaposition and quick succession of various imagined scenes, wish-fulfilment images, and perceptions convey Catherine's confused and fluid emotional state as she negotiates temporary separation from Valerie (the summer vacation), a forceful physical reunion (their playground fight), the development of much greater intimacy, and the stirrings of more complex affective reactions (jealousy, possessiveness, reciprocation anxiety, and — as their schooldays come to a close — fear of definitive separation).
- 22 "Rimbaud's Ophelia", *French Studies* 43.4, 1989, 423-36, p. 431. See *L'Opoponax*, 197.
- 23 See Monique Wittig, *Le chantier littéraire*, Lyon, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2010, *passim*.
- 24 Cf. Bourque, 143-45.
- 25 François de Malherbe, *Œuvres*, ed. Antoine Adam, Paris, Gallimard, 1971, 7-18.
- 26 For discussion and typologies of early film slapstick gags, see Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, 146-58; Kristine Brunovska Karnick and Henry Jenkins (eds), *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, London, Psychology Press, 1995; Anthony Balducci, *The Funny Parts: A History of Film Comedy Routines and Gags*, Jefferson, McFarland, 2011. The comic sequences in *L'Opoponax* contrast sharply with the earnest Catholic "educational" silent film screened in school (257-60), this latter passage serving as a contrapuntal, ironic *mise en abyme* that refers obliquely to the role played by a very different sort of silent film in the composition of the novel. Note also Wittig's use of a mime and clown in *Le Voyage sans fin* (*Vlasta*, 4, 1985) and her comments in the introduction to the translation that "film [...] has influenced all my writing", that "Film technique has influenced the form of this play not only at the level of dissociation of sound from action: the entire text is cut into short sequences so as to create a temporal space like that of cinema" ("The Constant Journey: An Introduction and a Prefatory Note", trans. Barbara Godard, *Modern Drama*, 39.1, 1996, 156-59, p. 157, 159).
- 27 See also p. 222.
- 28 See Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Anatomy of Harpo Marx*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2012, 13; Charlene Fix, *Harpo Marx as Trickster*, Jefferson, N.C., McFarland, 2013, 23.
- 29 Note also page 120 where Catherine falls in a cowpat.
- 30 The collective fall was a recurring feature of the silent slapstick film from its beginnings. See the 1907 Pathé short *Le cheval emballé* and D. W. Griffith's *The Curtain Pole* (1909).
- 31 Noël Carroll, *Comedy Incarnate: Buster Keaton, Physical Humor, and Bodily Coping*, London, Wiley, 2009, 9.
- 32 Mel Gordon, *Lazzi: The Comic Routines of the Commedia dell'Arte*, New York, PAJ, 1983, 13.



- <sup>33</sup> Note also the scene where Véronique Legrand bites into a maggoty apple (79), perhaps an echo of Chaplin in *The Circus* (1928), though, of course, the passage also lends itself to other symbolic readings.
- <sup>34</sup> Paris, Minuit, 1952, 9.
- <sup>35</sup> Mel Gordon, *op. cit.*, 9.
- <sup>36</sup> Paris, Minuit, 1957, 44-46.
- <sup>37</sup> Livia, *Pronoun Envy: Literary Uses of Linguistic Gender*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001; Bourque, *op. cit.*; Went-Daoust, "L'Opoponax ou le parcours de 'on'", *Neophilologus* 75.3, 1991, 358-66. See also Clarke, *op. cit.*
- <sup>38</sup> See Françoise Armangaud, "La contestation des conventions du discours chez Nathalie Sarraute et chez Monique Wittig", *Nouvelles Questions féministes*, 19.1 (1998), 35-64; Duffy, *op. cit.*; Noura Wedell, "Monique Wittig: la lettre et le geste", in Leclerc and Chevalier, *op. cit.*, 35-49, p. 42; Meret Stistrup Jensen, "Écrire dans la langue de tous: le point de vue particulier de Monique Wittig et d'Annie Ernaux", in *ibid.*, 95-110, p. 97.
- <sup>39</sup> Paris, NRF, 1918.
- <sup>40</sup> Dizain XLIX, line 1 of Scève's *Délie*. See Maurice Scève, *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. B. Guégan, Paris, Garnier, 1927, p. 21.
- <sup>41</sup> 1969 and 1985, both Paris, Minuit.
- <sup>42</sup> Also Julie in Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, mentioned on page 239.
- <sup>43</sup> Compare Bourque, 66-7.
- <sup>44</sup> Journeys and modes of travel are recurrent motifs in the intertextual quotations (11, 14, 26, 270, 281).
- <sup>45</sup> While Catherine's literary interests and creative activities lend weight to the autobiographical interpretation, such a reading would also, of course, work against the universalism that the use of the pronoun "on" was designed to convey. Wittig seems to be testing the strength of the critical drive to read biographically.
- <sup>46</sup> See Anne Green, *Flaubert and the Historical Novel: Salammbô Reassessed*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982. On the controversy surrounding Flaubert's sources, see *Œuvres complètes de Gustave Flaubert*, II, *op. cit.*, 369-487; Isabelle Strong, "Flaubert's Controversy with Froehner — the Manuscript Tradition", *Romance Notes* 16.2, 1975, 283-99.
- <sup>47</sup> See Margery A. Evans, *Baudelaire and Intertextuality: Poetry at the Crossroads*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993; William Olmstead, "The Palimpsest of Memory: Recollection and Intertextuality in Baudelaire's 'Spleen II'", *Romantic Review* 77, 1986, 359-67; Jonathan Culler, "Intertextuality and Interpretation: Baudelaire's 'Correspondences'", in Christopher Prendergast (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century French Poetry: Introduction to Close Reading*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, 118-37.
- <sup>48</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Antoine Adam, Paris, Gallimard, 1972, 11-12, 851.
- <sup>49</sup> Nicola Gardini, "History and Pastoral in the Structure of Leopardi's *Canti*", *Modern Language Review* 103. 1, 2008, 76-92. Note also the way in which "La Ginestra" echoes the themes of Pascal's *pensée* on the "Disproportion de l'homme" which is suggested for study during the retreat (178-79). See Nicholas Rennie, *Speculating on the Moment: The Poetics of Time and Recurrence in Goethe, Leopardi and Nietzsche*, Göttingen, Wallstein Verlag, 2005, 142.
- <sup>50</sup> Pierre Corneille, *Cinna*, ed. Alain Riffaud, Geneva, Droz, 2011, 215-17.
- <sup>51</sup> Malherbe, *op. cit.*, 771.
- <sup>52</sup> Michael Giordano, *The Art of Meditation and the French Renaissance Love Lyric: The Poetics of Introspection in Maurice Scève's Délie, Object de Plus Haulte Vertu* (1544), Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2010; Dorothy Gabe Coleman, *Maurice Scève: Poet of Love*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975; Deborah Lesko Baker, *The Subject of Desire: Petrarchan Poetics and the Female Voice in Louise Labé*, West Lafayette, Purdue University Press, 1996; Phyllis R. Brown, "A Voice Restored: Louise Labé's Impersonation of Sappho", in Paul Franssen and A. J. Hoenselaars (eds), *The Author as Character: Representing Historical Writers in Western Literature*, Madison, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009, 80-92; D. E. L. Sterritt, "A Latin Legacy in Louise Labé: Imitation of Tibullus 1.2.89-94", *French Forum* 30.2, 2005, 15-30.
- <sup>53</sup> See Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, 64-65; Keith Busby, "Narrative Genres", in Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, 139-52; Paul Zumthor, "Intertextualité et mouvance", *Littérature* 41, 1981, 8-16.
- <sup>54</sup> See Johannes A. van Waarden and Gavin Kelly (eds), *New Approaches to Sidonius Apollinaris*, Leuven/ Paris/ Walpole, M.A.: Peeters, 2013.
- <sup>55</sup> M. Owen Lee, *Virgil as Orpheus: A Study of the Georgics*, New York, SUNY Press, 1996, 29-42; William K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, New York, Norton, 1966.

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- <sup>56</sup> Guillaume de Syon, "Balloons on the Moon: Visions of Space Travel in Francophone Comic Strips", in Alexander C.T. Geppert (ed.), *Imagining Outer Space: European Astroculture in the Twentieth Century*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2012, 174-75.